

# Most Beautiful

Andy Warhol liked dance.

He made a painting in 1948 with that as a title: *I Like Dance*. I don't know whether or not his liking dance extended to liking *to* dance, although he did belong to the modern- dance club during his college days at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and his dance-diagram paintings suggest that maybe he tried at one time to learn ballroom technique. He was famous for hanging out in discos—from Arthur and Studio 54 to Area and the Palladium—and for a while he had his own club at the Dom in the East Village; and he referred to his suite of shadow paintings from 1978 as disco décor. Still, I don't recall ever seeing a photograph of him dancing. He was a balletomane in his “swish” days in the 1950s, and this interest in theatrical dance extended well into the pop era. Not only was Warhol a fan of Yvonne Rainer and other Judson dancers, but he also continued to frequent New York City Ballet. He and Edie Sedgwick made a spectacular appearance at the gala opening of George Balanchine's *Don Quixote* at City Ballet in 1965. According to the society pages of *Time* magazine, Edie climbed to the fourth-ring gallery of the New York State Theater promenade during intermission to dance the twist while Andy and his entourage offered a champagne toast from the main floor below.<sup>1</sup> I imagine Warhol was canny enough to know that this little stunt could have been seen as a send-up of Balanchine—who took the role of the Don himself—offering the tribute of his new ballet to his Dulcinea, Suzanne Farrell.

Dance also plays a significant role in Warhol's work. Warhol agreed to have Merce Cunningham use the *Silver Clouds* as the set for *RainForest* in 1968. Five years earlier, using photographs from Cunningham's 1958 *Antic Meet*, Warhol had made several silkscreen portraits of Cunningham, and in 1979 he reused one of the *Antic Meet* photo-graphs for a screen-print poster for Cunningham's company. The 1963 Cunningham silkscreen painting is one of many portraits by Warhol of dancers, starting with a blotted line drawing of Doris Humphrey made for the cover of *Dance Magazine* in 1953 and including the line drawings of John Butler that comprised his one-man show in 1954 at the Loft Gallery. He also made photobooth photos of New York City Ballet principal Edward Villella in 1963 and a number of 1970s silkscreen portraits of Martha Graham and Rudolf Nureyev. But Warhol's preferred medium for depicting dancers was film. There are *Screen Tests* of Judson choreographers Lucinda Childs (including one focused on her shoulder), Kenneth King, and Freddy Herko. *Haircut No. 1* features Herko along with fellow choreographer and dancer James Waring and Judson lighting designer Billy Linich (later Billy Name). There are films of Herko doing his roller-skate dance and Jill Johnston dancing at the Factory. In *Lonesome Cowboys*, Eric Emerson demonstrates his ballet moves to Joe Dallasandro; John Palmer and Ivy Nicholson frug for a few moments in their tiny kitchen in *John and Ivy*; and *Vinyl* ends with a frugging party among many of the performers, including Gerard Malanga and Edie Sedgwick. Edie

dancing the frug at the Factory is, in fact, one of the iconic images of her. Gerard is famous not only for his popper-fueled frugging in *Vinyl* but even more for his whip dance, often done with Mary Woronov, including in the short portrait film *Salvador Dalí*. Mario Montez sings and dances his way from one part of the furniture loft to another for the first “scene change” in *Hedy*, and he does a wicked Latin dance in *Camp* as Warhol’s camera zooms in and out.<sup>2</sup> The dance number comes after Mario has sung a one-verse version of “I Wish I Could Shimmy like My Sister Kate” (for some reason Gerard introduces Mario in *Camp* as Inez Martinez). *Camp* has another, remarkably touching dance number in which Baby Jane Holzer dances a duet with Paul Swan. Swan’s is the first in *Camp*’s series of performed routines. He dances his most famous dance, his 1915 tribute to World War I soldiers, *To Heroes Slain*, reprises it, and then Jane helps him up to his feet (Swan is eighty-two years old at the time, and his dance ends with him feigning death). Jane apparently gives Paul a kiss, off camera. He responds by suggesting that they do an impromptu version together. “You do whatever I do,” he proposes, and she, clearly used to being partnered on the dance floor, gamely follows right along.



Andy Warhol, *Camp*, 1965. 16mm film, b/w, sound, 66 minutes. Film still courtesy of The Andy Warhol Museum. © 2012 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of the Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

Jack Smith shares the stage with Swan in *Camp*. They seem an unlikely pair—but maybe not. After a series of performances of varying degrees of fun (the fun of Donyale Luna’s cat walk wearing a fur coat and matching fur-trimmed dress is halted too soon by the film running out, whereas Mar-Mar Donyle’s shenanigans early on are so tedious that you think they might never end, and indeed after a while Jack and Tally Brown begin to demonstrate their annoyance by lying next to each other on the couch and mooning for the camera, thus assuring us that we’re not the only ones who are put off). Tally’s act is to play temporary MC in order to introduce Jack. But first she weighs in on the question of camp, the ostensible subject of the film: “I don’t happen to believe in the existence of camp,” she says. “So, I’m going to do things for you that are absolutely serious, as I believe indeed everyone before me has done. I don’t think anybody’s camping. I think we’re all doing ourselves.” (This is clearly nonsense, since she’s just made perfectly clear that she didn’t find Mar-Mar’s routine serious; then again, it isn’t really camp either.) “Here,” she goes on, “are a few aspects of myself.” She proceeds to do an imitation of Yma Sumac, which would seem to qualify as camp if anything in the film does. Then comes her introduction: “It’s my pleasure to introduce a very talented man that I’ve had the pleasure of working with very often. He always does something absolutely sensational. I never know what it’ll be ... Do you want to do that tune, baby? Ladies and gentlemen, the one and only, the inimitable ... Jack Smith!” Jack doesn’t move from where he’s been standing at the back of the room. Tally has to go get him and drag him to the mike. She then begins to sing: “A cigarette that bears a lipstick’s traces / A shrunken head in unexpected places.” Smith does nothing at all for a moment, but eventually reaches into his pocket and pulls out a shrunken head, puts it noisily on the microphone, and begins to dance as the Ramsey Lewis trio recording of “The ‘In’ Crowd” kicks in again—it’s been played off and on throughout the film’s second reel, which began with Gerard reading his poem “Camp.” The poem begins:

Blown the truck drivers

Under the west side elevated highway

After 2:00 am in the rain

Behind staircases in tenement buildings

Chased out of Tompkins Square Park

Out from the enclosed courtyard

Beside the men’s room

By a plainclothesman

And the grass hillside

Where I was buggered in Riverdale by a Cornell student

While the last commuter train of the New York Central passed by<sup>3</sup>

Camp, for Gerard, seems to be just another excuse for braggadocio.

After his shrunken-head gag, Jack stands silent at the microphone. Finally he asks, tentatively, “Should I open the closet now, Andy? Should I open the closet? Should I open the closet?” A very long silence, and finally someone yells, “Cut.” “Why cut?” Jack asks. “Shall we open the closet?” He puts on his dark glasses. “Let’s open the closet.” Silence. “Let’s open the closet. Can we?” Finally it seems to be agreed that they’ll open the closet, and the entire crew moves to where the closet stands—dances over, really, to the strains of “The ‘In’ Crowd,” which kicks in again. The closet turns out to be a big art deco cabinet with Lucite dowels on the doors. You can clearly see a Batman comic inside.<sup>4</sup> Jack stands next to it and plays at the mystery of opening it for nearly ten minutes. He looks alternately pained, confused, worried, exasperated, sardonic, mischievous. He puts on and takes off his sunglasses. He reaches through the dowels and grabs a key. He holds it up, displays it in close-up, aims it like a tiny gun. He moves the mike, directs the lighting. Feeling the dowels on the door, he intones, “Translucite plastic.” He opens the closet, throws the key inside—demented laughter comes from off camera. He directs the camera to be brought forward. He reaches in, maybe touches the Batman comic, but we don’t know: The close-up is on his face. He shuts the door, and “The ‘In’ Crowd” starts up again—appropriately enough, since this whole drama of Batman in the closet is a Factory in-joke. In 1964 Warhol shot what seemed destined to be *the* great epic underground film, *Batman Dracula*, whose eponymous character was played by Smith. It might also have been Smith’s greatest film performance, but sadly we may never know, because Warhol left the film in the can, unassembled and unedited. So Smith’s scene at the closet in *Camp* is a manifestation of his seething fury at Warhol for not finishing the film.<sup>5</sup> Big drama follows Smith’s reaching into the closet. Because the crew seems not to want to move the camera in toward the cabinet, Jack and Tosh Carillo decide to do things the hard way and move the cabinet toward the camera, but it’s a heavy and unstable thing and nearly collapses on them. Straining to hold it in place and simultaneously caressing it, Jack stammers, “Art moderne ... breakfront.”

The improvised apodictic declaration is sheer genius. “Art moderne ... breakfront”: It’s nothing more than what this heavy object he’s struggling with—and what he’s got the camera, the crew, the cast, and the spectators to focus all our attention on—it’s nothing more than what, in fact, it is: an art moderne breakfront. We are at the opposite end of the performance spectrum, it seems, from Swan’s *To Heroes Slain*, a mimed dance elegy performed by a man at the nadir of his powers.



Andy Warhol, *Camp*, 1965. 16mm film, b/w, sound, 66 minutes. Film still courtesy of The Andy Warhol Museum. © 2012 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of the Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

In 1914, just before he made *To Heroes Slain*, Paul Swan was billed on theater marquees as “The Most Beautiful Man in the World” and proclaimed in the *New York Evening Journal* “The Prettiest Male in Captivity.”<sup>6</sup> His beauty was so renowned that it provided the laugh line of a Fred and Adele Astaire routine, when Adele would scold Fred, “Don’t think *you* look like Paul Swan,” a line Ira Gershwin would later use in a song for the musical *Funny Face*. We have a good idea what Swan looked like and how he danced, since there is an extant film of him from 1916 called *Diana the Huntress*.<sup>7</sup> Swan was in his early thirties at the time. He was what is known as an aesthetic dancer, like Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn. Largely untrained but for some lessons from ballet dancers Mikhail Mordkin and Andreas Pavley, he seems to have made it up as he went along.<sup>8</sup> A farm boy from a strict Presbyterian family in Crab Orchard, Nebraska, Swan escaped and became worldly. He met Nazimova in New York in 1909 and painted her portrait (Swan was a painter, sculptor, and poet as well as a dancer), and he saw Nijinsky and Karsavina dance *Le Spectre de la Rose* in 1911; he worked in Hollywood, appearing in *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben Hur*. Reviews of Swan’s dancing were ecstatic. *Theater Magazine*, 1913: “Swan: An American Who Revives the Greek Ideal”: “He is the first of our countrymen

brave and bold enough to champion the dance.... Although he is ... an artist, he dares to be dancer; and though he is a dancer, he dares to be a man. Such is his temerity, and when you consider that the world still suspects artists of being only half-men (the other half may be goblin, woman, divinity or devil), it is indeed temerity.”<sup>9</sup> In Paris in the early 1920s Swan began giving nude, or almost-nude, dance recitals. One reviewer wrote: “Even if there were no music, no costumes, and no dances, and he should stand alone upon the stage, no doubt Paris audiences would gather to admire him, for a figure like his has not been seen in Europe since Apollo Belvedere’s model went home to sit near the Gods.”<sup>10</sup> A decade later, when Swan was well into middle age, the reviewers remained convinced: “He dances nude,” one wrote, “a Greek bas-relief animated by the immortal spirit. One would like to understand what is the chemistry which could create such perfection.”<sup>11</sup> A final performance before fleeing Paris in the wake of war was met with the following by the critic of *Le Matin*: “His harmonious body is ever enhanced by the art of his ideal attitudes. Always searching new rhythmic figures, poetic and original expressions, this astounding artist was warmly applauded.”<sup>12</sup>







Charles Allen and Francis Trevelyan Miller, *Diana the Huntress*, 1916.

Swan returned to New York in 1939, where he settled into the former Carnegie Hall studio of Charles Dana Gibson, of Gibson Girl and an-onion-instead-of-an-olive fame; for a while, Swan's roommate in Studio 90 was Anita Loos, author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. One of their fellow tenants was Agnes de Mille, who was in the process of making the dances for what would become the Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* The success of de Mille's *Rodeo* at American Ballet Theater in 1942—not to mention Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* in 1944 and George Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* in 1946—makes clear just how much the American taste in concert dance had changed since Swan's early successes in the 1910s. Nevertheless, in the mid-1940s Swan began giving the weekly dance recitals that would, two decades years later, become the subject of Warhol's 1965 film *Paul Swan*. In the 1950s, these recitals were frequented by Marcel Duchamp, Robert Matta, and Alexander Calder. The younger artist Robert Barnes, who often went with them, wrote of Swan's recitals: "God, if there was a Duchampian theater, it was Paul Swan.... Matta found Paul Swan, made Marcel go, and then he became a fan. And the best thing that he did was the Bacchanal of the Sahara Desert in which he danced naked, virtually; he had veils, very gay. All by himself, he would do the bacchanal ... loving his veils and ending up totally naked."<sup>13</sup>

Swan doesn't do *The Bacchanal of the Sahara Desert* in Warhol's film; he doesn't dance naked—or even virtually naked. But he *does* appear virtually naked a number of times during costume changes. In *Paul Swan*, Warhol's camera, stationary in the first of the film's two reels, is trained on a set that consists of a tapestry backdrop, a folding chair, and several spotlights. At the left side of this "stage" is a black folding screen, behind which Swan occasionally disappears to search out a new costume. When changing costumes, he moves back and forth between this off-stage space and the makeshift dancing area. His costumes are themselves sometimes skimpy, consisting of flimsy briefs and tunics, pinned on with safety pins. Often as not, he removes one costume and gets into the next on camera, thus appearing stark naked but for a g-string. "Change there?" he asks at one point. "Well, I've got a little something on, anyway." In the second reel, when Swan spends an inordinate amount of time behind the screen, an off-camera voice tells Swan, "They want you to fix yourself out in front of them, because they still have the movie camera going." Swan replies, "Oh, I don't care," then thrusts his naked butt out beyond the screen. This seems to me the most telling sequence of Warhol's film—not the butt thrust, although that's telling in its own way too, but the fact that in a sixty-six-minute film, Swan spends over half of it *not performing* his dances or poetry but changing costumes, and in this particular sequence in the second reel he spends over fifteen minutes off camera looking for the pair of sandals that he insists must be worn with the French peasant costume he's in the very drawn-out process of putting on. As Callie Angell was quick to notice, Swan's performance "recall[s] the equally disorganized, equally uncompromising performances of Jack Smith."<sup>14</sup>

Smith's performances were notoriously slow to get going, if indeed they ever did. It was hard to tell, because he spent endless time futzing with his costume, getting his slides in order, complaining that nothing was going right. A passage from Stefan Brecht's description in *Queer Theatre* of Smith's *Secret of Rented Island* captures the feel of his work:

Smith kept getting the pages mixed up, losing his place, he was fighting the paper, asking the assistants for page 12 (was provided with it), showing the queen in the cart the right place,—in one sequence this latter gave various lines previously given, you were suddenly in the wrong place in the play, Smith pretending to be lost ("What's going on?!"). The performance, especially in the dramatic third act, under Smith's despairing, exasperated direction,—nobody is doing anything right!—keeps lapsing into work on the presentation.... Something wrong or missing: Smith disappears with nervously energetic steps to see to or fetch it.<sup>15</sup>

When I first saw *Paul Swan*, it was that fifteen minutes behind the screen that struck me as a truly Smith-like failure to get on with the show as the very substance of the performance. Although Swan constantly complains that the costume changes take too long, he goes right on dilly-dallying. Between the first two numbers, a recitation from Omar Khayyam's *Rubáiyát* (see plate 4) and a mime-dance that he announces as *The Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air—the Movements Seen and Unseen in Nature*, Swan protests, "Oh, goddamn, I can't do this, this way. It takes too long." He finishes putting on his sandals. "It takes too long," he moans again. "It spoils it. I can't do it." But then he consoles himself: "I suppose you can cut all that out, can't you?" He seems, on the contrary, perfectly well aware that nothing is going to be cut out, so he keeps right on performing his costume changes, increasing their duration as he goes. After a rendition of *To Heroes Slain*, he



takes a full ten minutes to get into his outfit for what he finally announces as “two Oriental numbers: *The Nightingale and the Rose* and *The Temple Bells Are Ringing*.” “This takes too long,” he complains again. “The audience has all gone home, waiting. I’m sure of that. You’re a paid clique.” He follows these disingenuous laments by methodically putting on his cheap jewelry. (See plate 5.) First, he tries putting his breastplate necklace over his headdress. It won’t fit over it, so he has to take the headdress off and start over, necklace first, followed by the headdress. He puts on a sandal, then another necklace; this one presents no problem because it has a clasp. Next come upper-arm bracelets, then wrist bracelets, earrings, another necklace (which makes it over the headdress), more bracelets, five or six rings, the other sandal. He fiddles with his scarf, goes halfway behind the screen, and adjusts his briefs. “There,” he declares.

The “Oriental” dance numbers, which together take just over four minutes, are followed by a fifteen-minute costume change, during which Swan spends most of the time behind the screen while the camera shows nothing but an empty set. Swan ignores the off-stage voice that cajoles, “Paul, come do it out here.” He’s determined to find his black sandals. Paul’s piano accompanist, Richard, goes behind the screen to help. “They have to be black,” Swan insists. “Where *are* they? I had them on this morning ... The pants are too tight. I have to ... Where would those slippers be?” Paul pokes his head out: “Doing the best I can, gentlemen,” disappears again. (See plate 6.) “Where in the hell? Goddamn it! They ought to be around again because I was wearing them all morning.” “Turn the camera off,” he mutters. “Where *would* they be? The slippers have to be right here.”

The off-stage voice becomes more insistent: “Paul, don’t wear the slippers.”

“See if you can pin that. That’s what I didn’t want to do out there. No, no, you know those black slippers. I wear them all the time.” Swan emerges for a split second to fetch the red cape from the stage floor. “Excuse me, won’t you,” he says and ducks back behind the curtain. “I think that’s the queerest damn thing there ever was. Couldn’t be up there.” Finally he appears, dressed. “There,” he says, but that’s not the end of it: “I wonder where those black damn things could be.”

“Paul, why don’t you just wear what you have ...”

“These shoes won’t do—got bells on them ... Where the hell is that ... ?”

“Richard, tell him those shoes are okay.”

“They were right here this morning.”

“Paul, maybe you can just improvise with the shoes that you have there for the time being, or the black socks.”

“They have to be here. Isn’t that very odd?”

Swan seems to be only partially reconciled to performing in the wrong footwear. “If any of you boys put those shoes in your pocket, I’ll have you arrested. They aren’t here. So there: end up in a great fight.” He smiles impishly and announces, “*Musical Lines on the Canvas of Space*. This is

the first one.”

Swan’s protracted preparing-to-perform-as-performance is something that Swan shares not only with Smith but also with Mario Montez in his work with Warhol. Think, for example, of the beginning of *Screen Test No. 2*, where Mario fiddles for the longest time tying a scarf into his wig, trying to get the knot to fall in a becoming way. Or *Hedy*, where Mario (as Hedy Lamarr) postpones going to trial with the delaying tactic of a long, drawn-out costume change (meant also to be a seduction and distraction of the store detective played by Mary Woronov). Or *More Milk Yvette*, where much of the film time is taken up with Mario (as Lana Turner) changing from ensemble to ensemble. Dressing (and undressing) on camera, the on-camera toilette, is a constant feature of Warhol’s films: Edie Sedgwick doing her makeup in *Poor Little Rich Girl* and *Lupe*; Paul America and Joe Campbell primping before the bathroom mirror for the entire second reel of *My Hustler*; Joe Spencer trying on bathing trunks and Ingrid Superstar taking off her blouse in *Bike Boy*; the entire cast of *Horse* playing strip poker; Eric Emerson stripping in *The Chelsea Girls*. I think we might even include the final reel of *Blow Job*, in which, if you pay close attention to his facial expressions and upper-body language, you can figure out that DeVerne Bookwalter is zipping up his pants and buckling his belt.

When Tally Brown says in *Camp*, “We’re all just doing ourselves,” she alludes to what had become by late 1964 the cinéma vérité quality of Warhol’s films—even those with scripted lines written by Ronald Tavel. The onstage or on-camera costume change can stand as a perfect figure for the blurred line between performing a character and performing oneself, between being, say, Mario Montez and being Mario Montez being Lana Turner, or between being Paul Swan and being Paul Swan being Paul Swan. *Camp* stages this phenomenon by having each participant “perform” in turn to the assembled group, acting as audience, as well as to the camera: Paul dances *To Heroes Slain*, Jodie Babs sings “Let Me Entertain You,” Gerard recites a poem called “Camp,” and so forth. Warhol wrote of this approach to performance in his reflections on *The Chelsea Girls* in *Popism*: “Everybody went right on doing what they’d always done—being themselves (or doing one of their routines, which was usually the same thing) in front of the camera.”<sup>16</sup> There is a slight distinction in *Camp* between each performance *as performance* and the ongoing performance of the entire scene of performance in front of Warhol’s camera, such as whether or not the performer stands, in his or her turn, before the microphone. The distinction between the performer as “doing” him- or herself and the performer as performing his or her routine is then more thoroughly confounded in Jack’s routine with the closet. Jack does Jack, and Jack also does a number with a shrunken head that he’s clearly worked out in advance with Tally, and Jack needles Andy about the abandoned *Batman Dracula* footage, and Jack directs the crew to get the lighting and camera distance the way he wants it, and Jack—being and doing Jack—improvises lines in his inimitable fashion.

Paul is less comfortable with improvising lines. He’s used to a long career of recitation. Many of his dances are recitations accompanied by mimed or otherwise symbolic gestures. Indeed, most of Paul’s dancing seems to consist of “showing” in gestural movements the scenario of a work. In

the second, fire section of *The Elements*, as he performs it in *Paul Swan*, for example, he waves his hands in flamelike motions, then puts his head near the ground and blows, as if to ignite embers. He gradually stands up, and his body and hands swirl together. He flames. He is—I'll risk making the comparison to Smith obvious—a flaming creature. In *To Heroes Slain*, he marches onto the stage, shouldering his sword, then mimes leading his troops forward, alternating with thrusting and parrying the sword. He lays down the sword and bows over it in grief; he gets up, points at the sword (now standing for a dead soldier), and gestures as if beseeching "Why, oh why?" A few hand movements to suggest covering the buried body with dirt complete the ritual. He stands and mournfully moves off the stage, only to quickly return, retrieve the sword, and bear it above his head as he retreats a final time.

The second of *Paul Swan*'s two reels starts with Paul dancing his "Oriental numbers," and Warhol shifts from a completely stationary to a highly mobile camera and from medium shot to tight close-ups—on Paul's face and details of his costume. The film is color (together with *Lupe*, it's one of the first of Warhol's films shot with the Auricon camera to be in color), so we see very clearly Paul's aging pink flesh and his smeared-on black shoe-polish eye makeup. Is Warhol making fun of this old man? Is Paul Swan camp to Warhol? Angell answers both questions:

Warhol's interest in Paul Swan seems to have been based on the observation that, in his unswerving dedication to his increasingly anachronistic art form, Swan had become the living embodiment of camp, which had been defined by Susan Sontag: "In naïve, or pure Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve."<sup>17</sup>

And: "Warhol's film *Paul Swan*, while often hilarious, does not really make fun of its subject: instead, the seriousness with which Swan restages his antique performances ... becomes oddly impressive after a while." (It is here that Angell goes on to connect Swan to Smith.) A comparison of *Paul Swan* with two other films is my speculative way of addressing these questions further.

Warhol cast very few old people in his films. The middle-aged Marie Menken appeared in *The Life of Juanita Castro* and *The Chelsea Girls*. But otherwise, apart from a few *Screen Test* subjects—Salvador Dalí, Edwin Denby, and Marcel Duchamp were old in the mid-1960s; Charles Henri Ford, Ruth Ford, Willard Maas, Menken, Henry Rago, and Zackary Scott were middle-aged—there is only *Mrs. Warhol*, a film made the year following *Paul Swan* and one in some ways very much like it. *Mrs. Warhol* is also a two-reel portrait film shot in color.<sup>18</sup> (See plate 7.) And the subject of the film, Warhol's mother, also moves from performing herself to performing her role, that of an aging movie star apparently based on an amalgamation of Gloria Swanson's character in *Sunset Boulevard* and Hedy Lamarr's in *White Cargo*. Her current-in-a-long-line of husbands is played by Warhol's then boyfriend Richard Rheem, and it is more from Richard's dialogue than Julia Warhola's that we can figure this out: "When were you a Max Sennett baby?" he asks, and "For what movie did you win the Academy Award?" or "Are you going to kill me like all the rest?" "How many of them were there, fifteen?" Julia's dialogue suggests little familiarity with Hollywood: "You're just keeping me for cook," she mock-complains, or "I'm going to take a

broom on you.” The real story of the film is the bond between these two performers, whose affectionately teasing relationship makes domesticity look almost appealing. “You’re sweet,” Richard tells Julia, and she replies, “You’re sweet yourself.” They look into each other’s eyes. Like Paul Swan, Julia Warhola is a bit daffy in her old age, but she also seems extraordinarily self-aware and able to laugh at herself. The steady gaze of Warhol’s camera lets self-awareness seep into these old people’s self-portrayals—I’d almost like to say, contradictorily, in spite of themselves—*self-aware in spite of themselves*. Perhaps, then, cinéma vérité is a designation that isn’t entirely wrong as applied to Warhol’s filmmaking. (When Jonas Mekas applied it to Warhol, he preferred the term “direct cinema.”)<sup>19</sup>

Finally, I want to suggest the possibility of self-styled cinéma vérité *as unintentional camp* in another film portrait of a dancer made just a few years after *Paul Swan*.<sup>20</sup> The film, *Man Who Dances*, was made by Drew Associates, the company founded by Robert Drew to make the documentary *Primary*, about the 1960 primary election campaign of John F. Kennedy against Hubert Humphrey in Wisconsin. *Primary*, which Drew claimed was the first film made with sync-sound camera that moved freely among the characters of a breaking story, was made with a team that included D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and Albert Maysles.<sup>21</sup> In 1968, Drew Associates made *Man Who Dances* for NBC television’s Bell Telephone Hour. As the film’s title and subtitle appear on the screen, a voice-over narrator speaks them—“Man who dances, Edward Villella”—and then continues over footage of Villella rehearsing: “He was the welterweight boxing champion of the New York Maritime Academy. Now he’s a star of the new generation of male dancers that is exciting the world of ballet with breathtaking speed, power, and manly art.” The particular veritas that this vérité work intended to reveal is that a dancer can indeed be a man. And what better man than Villella, who had appeared ten years earlier in another NBC television special, this one directed by Gene Kelly, called *Dancing Is a Man’s Game*. Kelly put Villella in the company of Mickey Mantle, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Johnny Unitas to draw parallels between the prowess and grace of dancers and that of athletes. *Man Who Dances* includes a heartwarming sequence in which Villella gives a lecture-demonstration on ballet at Canarsie High School, located in a working-class district of Brooklyn whose population shifted over the years from Jewish and Italian to primarily African-American and Latino.<sup>22</sup> Convincing these tough high school boys that dancing can be a man’s game wouldn’t be easy, but Villella had the credentials to do it: He went to Canarsie High himself, where he lettered in baseball, and, of course, he was a boxing champ. To clarify the difference in the games of sports and ballet, he begins by explaining that when an outfielder catches a fly ball, he runs the best way he can and jumps the best way he can to make the catch. Catching the ball makes the moves beautiful. But in dancing, the interest is in the form and the line that the body displays when it moves. “I can’t just stick my hand out, like that,” he says as he thrusts his arm straight out. “There has to be a form. There has to be a line. How am I going to do it? Well, I can’t hold it like that. That’s too rigid. I can’t hold it like that”—he makes an exaggerated limp-wrist gesture—“that’s a little, uh, overly poetic. I take a line from the top of my head, right down the side, the shoulder, the elbow, straight to the tips. And this is how I would

stand onstage in this particular position.” He assumes his port de bras in second position.



Robert Drew, Drew Associates for the Bell Telephone Hour, *Man Who Dances: Edward Villella*, 1968.

This must have been a fairly standard lecture-demonstration shtick for Villella, because several years earlier he seems to have performed it for Warhol in a photobooth, substituting for the usual face shot a series of arm positions for three out of the four exposures on each strip. The limp wrist isn't a prominent pose, but it's one of the ones he plays with. Villella seems an unlikely subject for Warhol's photobooth procedure; after all, Warhol had to persuade his sitters to meet him for the shooting session in Times Square, where the photobooth he used was located. But Villella was clearly game to be part of *Harper's Bazaar's* "New Faces, New Forces, New Names in the Arts" feature, for which an editor at the magazine had commissioned Warhol to take the photographs: Twenty-two strips of photobooth photos of Villella were found in Time Capsule Twenty-One at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.<sup>23</sup>

*Man Who Dances* is a narrative about a particular weekend during which Villella had to dance a number of punishingly difficult roles. In the matinee performance of *Raymonda Variations*, he had fallen onstage after his muscles cramped, so the question is whether he can do the evening



performance of *Rubies*, a ballet Balanchine made for him to display his special qualities as an all-American tough guy from Queens. But the real drama isn't about whether Villella will get through *Rubies*; it's about how a dancer can be made to look like a man. How this may be accomplished becomes obvious early on in a scene shot in Villella's dressing room after his fall in *Raymonda*, where we see the dancer massaging his sore body while explaining the problem with his muscles: "Muscles don't know anything about emotion or the mind or how tired your being is," he says. "All they know is the amount of lactic acid in the muscles, which slows them down, makes the cramps, and doesn't let the blood get out. That's all muscles know." Explaining how muscles work, displaying them, showing how ballet taxes them—this is how to make a dancer masculine. It can't be done when the muscles are simply doing their job, when the dancer is onstage, dancing. It is done when he's offstage, or behind the curtain, where the muscles, too full of lactic acid, preventing the blood from replenishing them, are aching, tightening, cramping. In *Man Who Dances*, onstage and offstage are strictly separate spaces. Only offstage can a man show the reality of his muscles, and that reality is not pretty. In the performance of *Rubies* around which the narrative of *Man Who Dances* revolves, every time Villella comes offstage, he collapses, out of breath and in excruciating pain. Somehow, of course, he manages to pull himself together for the next entrance and, in the end, to get through the ballet. But even as he finishes *Rubies* in triumph, he collapses in pain as soon as the curtain comes down. He's still a real man, with real muscles.<sup>24</sup>

In *Man Who Dances*, the terrible strain on Villella's muscles finds its perfect counterpart in the strain exerted by Drew Associates to represent the masculinity of a man who dances. Clearly Warhol didn't think "the most beautiful man in the world" required so much effort—remember, Swan, too, had the temerity to be a man who dances. Nor did Warhol feel the need to draw such a distinction between onstage and off. Swan himself took a philosophical view of dancing. A 1944 *Dance Magazine* piece on him reports: "With Swan, dancing is a way of life. He advises people to go home after the day's work, take off their heavy drab clothing, get into something light and colorful, turn on the radio and dance."<sup>25</sup>





Andy Warhol, *Edward Villella*, 1963. Photobooth photograph. Collection of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA. © 2011 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Robert Drew, Drew Associates for the Bell Telephone Hour, *Man Who Dances*: Edward Villella, 1968.